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Several ways to plan realistically for the improvement of curriculum in the Detroit Great Cities project are outlined: curriculum councils, departmental curriculum committees, school groups, teachers' meetings, workshops, and released time for curriculum work. Techniques to be used in any specific situation should be determined by the present curriculum, the needs of teachers, the availability and competence of leadership, and the ends desired by the total group. Identification and study of problems, organized conferences and films are among the techniques to be used in specific situations. Basic principles which underlie improvement in curriculum planning are: participation should be by all persons concerned with education of young people, plans should be simple and workable, organization should be adaptable to specific types and sizes of schools, plans should be an integral part of total educational organization, and information should be communicated to all those concerned. Barriers to curriculum improvement are recognized as inertia, fear, lack of time, money and leadership.

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GREAT CITIES SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Need to Improve Curriculum

Carl L. Marburger
Director

William M. Rasschaert
Project Evaluator

August 3, 1962

Detroit, Michigan

ED001051

GREAT CITIES SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Need to Improve Curriculum

A variety of activities has been tried in the Great Cities Project and a number of different approaches have been made since the time of the Pilot Project, to improve a curriculum in the Great Cities Project experimental schools. Some have met with degrees of success and some have not. Through all of the Great Cities Project experimental schools, it seems that there should be some general approach which can be tried systematically and regularly and initiated as early as possible in the fall of 1962 to achieve curriculum improvement in each of the seven schools.

After two years of the "project proper" being in operation, the staff are of the opinion that there should be more organized approaches to involve more people more deeply in order to reach the goals of our project. Up to this time the one dimension of activity which has been least intensively considered and acted upon is that of curriculum improvement. This certainly can be justified for a number of reasons:

A. Beginning in July 1960, it was imperative that the four schools that entered the project at that time be completely oriented and adjusted to participating in the project; this required communications among and between individuals and groups within the seven schools.

B. It has also been necessary during the past two years to establish rapport among and between individuals and groups including the project staff with the principals, the principals with their

faculties, and total faculties and other personnel with consultant and advisory individuals and groups.

C. During the past two years our major operation and attention have been given to organizing, developing, and defining the roles of special personnel, namely, the coaching teachers, the visiting teachers, and the school-community agents operating in our experimental schools and this has taken energies and time from all of us involved at the administrative level.

D. Finally, but not exhausting the list of justifiable reasons for our delay in reaching the curriculum improvement stage, is the whole matter of baseline data collection. A great deal of effort has gone into the planning, obtaining, administering, collecting, scoring, and evaluating the tests administered at many grade levels in our experimental schools; in addition, we have had to develop some instruments of our own which have been given to selected groups of pupils at various grade levels and this too has made demands upon faculties, administrators, and the project staff personnel.

For all of the reasons mentioned above and more that we could name, curriculum improvement has regularly been pushed back as a consideration both implicitly and in an operational way. Because the summer of 1965 will be a key time in the life of our project, it is imperative that we begin now to discuss and plan realistically the improvement of curriculum in a systematic manner.

There are several ways that we could approach systematic curriculum improvement. One of the most obvious ways and one which has received the endorsement of the Citizens' Committee on School Needs in their document on Curriculum, is the establishment of curriculum committees or councils in each of our seven schools. Another possible approach would be the establishment of departmental curriculum committees and the consideration of curriculum in a systematic and intensive manner by the cabinets at the secondary school level. A third method of regularly giving attention to curriculum would be the devotion of one or more teachers' meetings per month to the improvement of curriculum and instruction and by utilizing the small work group as a means of identifying problems and of working towards solutions. Still another technique might be to have representatives from each school meet on a bi-monthly basis with selected principals and/or with the project staff personnel to identify instructional needs and to work toward the writing of instructional materials, units of instruction, and to try generally to improve the curricular offerings of the various schools as a group. None of these methods will be easy to organize and put into operation for many reasons including the major one, lack of teacher-release time. Although we are looking forward with some anticipation to having teacher-release time, until such promise develops into actuality, we must plan at this point for systematic curriculum improvement involving teachers without the luxury of teacher-release time.

Very briefly, on the pages which follow, we have tried to systematize some approach to the considerations mentioned in the paragraphs above. Perhaps it would serve to help us in our initial stages to consider the feasibility and value

of one or more of these approaches, or on the other hand, some combination of these or, again, a completely different possibility. At any rate, we would appreciate your earnest and invaluable attention to these matters hoping that we might be able to initiate very soon some systematic and organized approaches to the problem of improving curriculum and instruction in our experimental schools.

SUGGESTED WAYS OF INVOLVING TEACHERS IN CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT IN GREAT CITIES PROJECT EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS

Purposes and Goals

Regardless of which method or combination of methods we might select to improve curriculum and instruction in our schools, we must cope with the entire phenomena of purposes and goals. It may help us to consider at the outset that purposes and goals are perceived differently by different individuals and groups. Each teacher, possibly, and certainly the teachers as a group, may have "purposes" in and for the curriculum council or other technique in their school that may be quite different (yet fully legitimate and constructive) than those of the school and project administrators. The principals' purposes might not be identical to those of the project staff yet fully as valuable and important. In short, we must realize that purposes will vary in terms of the perceptions of the participants. This is not only inevitable but desirable as long as we keep the view that "different purposes" are not "mutually excluding purposes."

Some Alternative Ways of Improving Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum Council

The establishment of curriculum councils in each of our seven schools could well be an outstanding achievement for the project and for each individual school as we would be putting into effect some of the recommendations made by the Citizens' Advisory Committee several years ago and, more recently, the Committee on Equal Educational Opportunities. Each school might state the purpose of a curriculum council as existing, "for the improvement of curricular offerings and instructional techniques." The comprehensive nature of curriculum is such that it is not possible to discuss it from a problem-solving point of view without touching either peripherally or intensely on every aspect of school operation; this would include class size, materials used in the classroom, patterns of organization, card-marking, discipline, and many other aspects of schools and their personnel. A specific charge to a curriculum council in any given school might be to discuss, identify, and to reduce learning-teaching problems that the council, with the cooperation of the principal and other staff members, deems of priority importance. The latter stage, "to reduce problems" might be done outside of the setting of the regular curriculum council meetings and may have to be done in a workshop setting or at some time when the council can give thorough and intensive attention to the areas they have identified as needing work. In other words, out of the council meetings may come other activities involving more teachers than those formally appointed to the council where some long range activities such as the writing of units of instruction, the modification of present materials, or the re-organization of existent courses of study may need additional time and personnel.

Departmental Curriculum Committees

Both at the elementary and secondary level, specific committees can be organized around subject areas such as language arts, mathematics, science, and others. Another way of organization of these committees would be to center them around levels such as the nursery, kindergarten, primary grades, middle elementary, or senior high. Possibly from these committees a central steering committee could be organized which would have representatives from the various sub-committees coordinating the efforts of the total school. This would be much like a curriculum council but working from the opposite direction, namely--that more people become initially involved (a broader base) in the curriculum committees while, on the other hand, in the curriculum council we start with fewer people and work toward involving a larger number of people. Graphically, an analogy might be that the curriculum committees might appear as a typical pyramid involving a broad base of personnel leading to a pinnacle of a focused few who would have representation on the curriculum council; the curriculum councils graphic design would be an inverted pyramid which begins with the curriculum council and spreads out to include larger numbers of people. There are advantages to both which might be discussed and identified in the meetings of the project staff and principals and the district administrators before initial presentation is made to the faculties of the individual schools.

School "Cabinet" Groups

The principal and his "cabinet" have long been in existence in the secondary schools. These cabinets are ordinarily comprised of department heads, counselors, assistant principal, and principal, with key members of the faculty brought in at various times for special purposes. It is self-evident that the cabinet organization could lend itself very usefully to initiation of establishment of curriculum councils or curriculum committees or both. The cabinet itself, meeting as a working group, ordinarily is dealing with a complex of administrative problems which would be of such a nature and extent that there would probably be little time to do systematic and comprehensive work in the area of improving the curriculum in detail. Its great value lies in the fact that it is a formal group that can be used to motivate and initiate other forms of organization which could deal with the special problems of curriculum and instruction on an intensive level.

Teachers' Meetings

After consideration in the principals' meetings with project staff and district administrators, it may be decided by a given school that one or more teachers' meetings be so organized and planned that during the next year or two faculties be organized in a variety of ways to give attention to problems of curriculum and instruction. This could mean initially meeting with the total faculty each time to take care of administrative matters, briefly, if this

is possible, and then breaking up into working groups. If this could be done without fail, twice a month, for the entire ten months for a given school year, it is conceivable that systematic attention could be given to the curriculum with subsequent improvement of instructional units, materials, plans of organization and any other aspects of the learning-teaching situation that are identified as priority areas. This method has the advantage of involving total faculty very early in the entire process. It also has the disadvantage of involving many people, some of whom do not have the necessary information and skills to do the kinds of problem-solving activities which all of us know are necessary in this work.

Workshops

In addition to the regular workshops which we have had in our schools, it is possible to consider a series of meetings over an entire school year which would have a workshop setting. In the 1960 Yearbook, ASCD presents a format for regular opportunities for teachers, supervisors and administrators to come together to identify their concerns, to clarify their thinking, and to work out conclusions related to teaching-learning processes. This format follows below:

Activity	Time	Topics	Attendance	Leadership
Fall Weekend Camp Workshop	Late November	"Evaluating Instruction" (example)	Optional for teachers, supervisors and administrators	Local with university consultants, parents, and high school students
Spring Conference	Early March (on a school day)	"Developing Our Human Resources" (example)	Required for all professional personnel	Local with university and community consultants
Spring Professional Growth Workshops	Post-school term in June	1. "Production of Audio-Visual Teaching Aids" 2. "Problems of Children" (examples)	Optional for teachers principals	Local with supervisors and psychologists
Midsummer Workshop	Mid-August	"Administrative and Supervisory Problems"	Optional for administrators, supervisors and interested teachers	Local with university and outside public school consultants

It is our opinion that the format outline above would be most productive if there is need for it. As we said earlier in this paper, the arrangements and financing of these kinds of ventures are not simple but should be considered because some solutions could be worked out.

Released Time for Curriculum Work

Although this is the crucial area in which we have not yet achieved successful support, we anticipate much more positive support for the idea if we can substantiate, as project staff, principals, and district administrators working together, the need for early dismissal, closing school for full or part days, or the assignments of substitute teachers to the classroom permitting regular teachers to attend meetings or engage in other curriculum work. We know that in some school systems teachers are released for a period of days or even weeks to complete a particular assignment or engage in a specific activity. In some schools the students are brought together for special large-group instruction while the released teachers meet in groups. By including planning in the school time-table, some principals free teachers periodically for curriculum work. There are almost infinite variations of how release-time can be arranged.

Other Ways of Helping to Improve the Curriculum and Instruction

Reduced Instructional Load for Program Planning

The teaching assignments of some instructors may be reduced slightly or substantially. For example, a teacher may be given a half or two-thirds normal teaching load in order to use the remainder of his time for a specific in-service assignment. Or, a teacher may count on an afternoon a week to participate in an in-service program or on a committee.

Extension of School Year for Planning Time

In some school systems, the school year has been extended for a period ranging from a few days to a few weeks before or after the normal school calendar. For this additional time in which planning fills the hours without the additional demands of classroom teaching, teachers are paid regular salaries. Schools which regularly have had teachers report a few days early and stay on a few days after the close of the school year have found it relatively easy to extend the time for curriculum planning.

Extension of the Professional Day

Faculty groups and total staffs have found time to work on curriculum planning by meeting either before the opening of the school day, at its close, or even during the lunch period. All of us recognize the integral nature of in-service activity and program planning and we are aware that some teachers prefer a regular planning period at the start or close of the school day to released time during instructional hours.

Additional Employment for Curriculum Planning

School systems sometimes employ teachers during the summer vacation period to work on a particular curriculum assignment. Bulletins, guides, and instructional materials have been developed by teachers hired for an additional period of time to undertake or to complete some curriculum assignment.

In summary, it is possible to identify from the literature some basic principles which underlie any plan we may choose. These are taken from Hugh B. Wood's, Foundations of Curriculum Planning and Development, 1960, and are selected because they are representative of ideas in many publications on curriculum and instruction.

1. Provisions should be made for participation by all persons concerned with the education of youth.

2. Plans should be simple and workable.

3. The plan of organization should be adaptable to various types and sizes of schools.

4. The plan should be an integral part of the total educational organization.

5. The plan, procedures, responsibilities, and other details should be known to those concerned.

"Much of the work of curriculum planning must of necessity be done by committees. Generally speaking, action committees are more effective than advisory committees. Where legal provisions assign responsibility to administrators, the wise leader seeks committee advice only when he is willing to share his responsibility and follow the advice of his committee. He may ask the committee to assist in policy development, in the solution of problems or, in general, planning activities, but he should desire and seek instructive contributions not merely approval of his plans. Committee work is important and committees should have responsibilities."

Finally, the techniques to be used in any specific situation to improve the curriculum should be determined by the present status of the curriculum, the needs of teachers and others responsible for curriculum planning and

development, the availability and competence of leadership, and the ends desired by the total group. Some procedures serve identical purposes, others quite different ends, as we said earlier in this paper. Some appeal to one type of teacher, some to another. There is no single guiding criterion for their selection and use; their choice must be guided by local factors. Some of the techniques have greatest value for stimulating interest in curriculum work when this is needed, some are definitely research techniques for analyzing the school-community situation,* and still others may be used for both purposes.

Also from Wood, we come to a number of techniques to be used in specific situations. This list follows below:

1. Identification and study of problems. Various methods are available for identifying and studying problems. The wealth of problems that are available to us for study is often minimized, but in the Great Cities Project schools it would seem that we would have no lack of content for this particular focus of energy.

2. Organized conferences. This is another way of saying workshops, institutes, curriculum council or committee meetings and other forms of getting people together. The difference, if any, is that conferences gather for a relatively brief but intensive experience in consideration of curriculum improvement, either generally or on some specific topic.

3. Films. Some of the professional films which are illustrative for the purpose of curriculum improvement include the following:

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*Smith, Stanley and Shores outline five areas for school-community analysis: 1) the opinions of parents, children and educational personnel regarding the adequacy of the educational program, 2) the relations between the social strata to which the individuals belong and their opinions about the school, 3) channels of community influence, 4) the human situation and faculty morale, and 5) the extra community influences, such as state rules under which the school operates.

a. Accent on Learning, Ohio State University

b. Bringing the World to the Classroom, Encyclopedia Britannica of Films

c. Broader Concept of Method, McGraw-Hill Company

d. Learning through Cooperative Planning, Teachers' College, Columbia U.

e. Wilson Dam School, Tennessee Valley Authority

f. Cascade Classroom, Washington State Office of Public Instruction

4. A few recordings now available that serve a purpose similar to the films and may be used in the same manner are:

a. Who Should Plan the Curriculum, Hugh Wood

b. Mental Health in the Curriculum, Irve Cunningham

c. Improving Language Skills, Matilda Baily

d. Widening Occupational Roles Kit (Work), SRA 1962, Series of five filmstrips

There is also the possibility of making recordings of lectures, panel discussions and other conferences and then can be brought back to the group. As you know, we have these available on Havighurst, Kirk, and other speakers we have had in the past.

5. Opinion polls and inventories. There are many models for opinion polls and inventories and questionnaires that can be used to have the teacher present his point of view on what needs to be done to improve curriculum and instruction. These are available in publications on curriculum, supervision, administration, and sociology, have been tried and have been proved successful.

6. Socio-metric techniques. This year has initiated one of the most intensive and one of the broadest research projects in the sociometry of large cities that has been done so far in the Michigan area. This is the cooperative University of Michigan--School of Social Work--Great Cities Project venture into the Detroit Area Study. Much of the data coming from this and many of the techniques used should be of help to us in curriculum improvement.

7. Weekend camp workshops

8. Visitation of other classrooms in schools

9. Individual Conferences

10. Experimentation-Action Research

11. Parent-teacher planning conferences

12. College Courses

13. Production of Materials

What Are Some of the Barriers to Curriculum Improvement And How Can We Deal With Them?

All of us on the project staff and in the principal group and our district administrators are deeply concerned with the desire for an excellent education for all the boys and girls in our project, indeed, in the entire city. Because we feel this way it is essential that we support actively and contructively any ventures into this whole area. Even though we are supportive, we know that there are barriers and handicaps to any successful program. Wood identifies some of these below.

1. Inertia

2. Fear

3. Lack of time

4. Lack of money

5. Lack of leadership

These are factors which we can define and discuss in our meetings together as principals, project staff and district administrators. Until these barriers are removed or reduced, there can be little improvement in the school or in professional growth among teachers.

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